THE

RECONSTRUCTIONIST

DEDICATED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF JUDAISM AS A RELIGIOUS CIVILIZATION, TO THE UPBUILDING OF ISRAEL'S ANCIENT HOMELAND, AND TO THE FURTHERANCE OF UNIVERSAL FREEDOM, JUSTICE AND PEACE.

Vol. II. June 12, 1936 Sivan 22, 5696 No. 9

EDITORIALS

A STEP IN THE WRONG DIRECTION

THE NEWEST FORM OF ASSIMILATION

PRAYER AND THE MODERN JEW

by Eugene Kohn

FACING REALITIES REALISTICALLY

by Jeremy Nabee

QUESTION AND ANSWER

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ANALYZE THIS ISSUE OF

THE RECONSTRUCTIONIST

You will understand what is meant by concerning yourselves with the totality of Jewish life.

A Step in the Wrong Direction: deals with the problem of Jewish community organization.

The Newest Form of Assimilation: deals with the relation of communism to Jewish life.

Prayer and the Modern Jew: deals with the problem of creating a Jewish religion for the religionless Jew.

Facing Realities Realistically: deals with the problem of anti-Semitism and its relation to the social scene.

Question and Answer: deals with the problem of reorienting Jewish thought to the best in modern thought.

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EDITORIALS

A Step in the Wrong Direction

THE editors of the RECONSTRUCTIONIST agree with those organizations and individuals who have expressed themselves as opposed to the convening of the World Jewish Congress this summer. But the editors oppose the World Jewish Congress for altogether different reasons from those that have thus far been advanced. The American Jewish Committee, which has articulated its opposition in circular letters to many American rabbis, and to its membership, bases its strongest arguments against the Congress on fear: fear that a similar congress will be convened by the Arabs, fear that the accusations frequently made against the Jews will become justified. The main accusation is that the Jews constitute an international conspiracy, that they have created a supergovernment, loyalty to which must transcend the Jews' loyalty to any particular government under which they live.

It is pretty discouraging to believe that the Jews have anything to fear beyond what they are already experiencing. The thought that conditions for them could be worse than they are at present staggers the imagination. What the opponents of the Congress do not apparently realize is that the Jewish people has nothing to lose. Faced with a raging anti-Semitism in almost every country of the world, cut off from any further migrations to places of refuge, and hounded in the country of their last resort, the Jews feel that they are trapped.

Besides, the charge that the Jews are internationally organized has been made without basis in fact, and has been acted upon by those who consider such organization malevolent. Does it matter to anti-Semites whether their accusations are true or not? Their hatred of the Jews does not derive from what the Jews do or what they fail to do. Why then should the Jews not derive whatever benefit they can from cooperation and united action? Furthermore, is there not the possibility that the sinister motives which anti-Semites ascribe to Jewish internationalism may be exposed as fictitious if a Congress should convene and deliberate in the open? The suspicion of conspiracy might thus be allayed.

The real objection to the World Jewish Congress is that it pretends to be a parliament. It will be convened despite the refusal to participate on the part of the American Jewish Committee, the B'nai B'rith, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the National Labor Committee (to mention only a few of the organizations abstaining), and the major representative bodies of English and other European Jewries. To imply that the body which will meet this summer is representative of the whole people is to be guilty of misrepresentation. If any portion of a people, rightly or wrongly,

withholds its support, the whole people is not represented. The World Jewish Congress dare not represent itself to be what it is not, and it must either modify its character or dissolve itself.

If the leaders of the Congress movement were to think in terms of calling a *conference,* much of the objection would disappear. A conference is undoubtedly necessary at this time. Jews must come together to discuss their common plight: their economic insecurity, their political uncertainty, their cultural sterility. There is no question but that if serious and thinking Jews would spend a considerable period of time together, and would concentrate the power of their collective intelligence upon the Jewish problem, some fruitful and creative ideas would emerge. A less pretentious emergency conference could arouse no opposition from Jews who sincerely seek the welfare of their people.

Eventually, of course, some kind of World Jewish Congress will have to be established. But like any congress, it would have to be the apex of a solid pyramid, with a broad base in mass support. The RECONSTRUCTIONIST has consistently maintained that such a congress presupposes the existence of organized Jewish communities in every important Jewish center of population. The representatives of the Jewish communities would constitute a *real* American Jewish Congress in our country; similar Jewish congresses would be created in other countries. Then the time would be ripe for convening a World Jewish Congress, consisting of the representatives of the various national Jewish congresses.

Until that time, however, all talk of a World Jewish Congress can be nothing more than talk. So long as Jews do not accept explicitly a conception of Judaism which involves unity and representation as integral to their lives as Jews, meetings and conventions will present only the will of those who happen to attend. Some time ago the American Jewish Congress decided to postpone indefinitely the project of convening a world congress, and to concentrate their efforts upon establishing in America the kind of Jewish communities which would form the first units of representative Jewry. At that time, the RECONSTRUCTIONIST, commenting upon this decision, heartily approved it, and called it a "step in the right direction." The leaders of the Congress have apparently regretted taking this right step and it is therefore necessary for the RECONSTRUCTIONIST to warn them that they are now about to take a step in the wrong direction.

The Newest Form of Assimilation

THE communists, like the Bourbons, apparently forget nothing and learn nothing—at least as far as the Jewish question is concerned. Seven years have passed since the tragic events of 1929 in Palestine when the Jewish communists greeted the Arab pogrom makers as social revolutionaries that were battling to emancipate Palestine from British despotism. During the course of these years Jewish need throughout the world has become more acute, and Palestine has proved ever more urgent as a place of refuge for our persecuted people in Germany, Poland, and the other countries of their affliction. These years have furthermore proved that the Jewish reconstruction of Palestine holds no menace for the economic position of the native Arab population, that the growing prosperity of the country spells an increase in the standard of living for the Arab no less than for the Jew. Yet, as terrorist Arab elements now threaten to halt Jewish resettlement in the country with fire and sword, the communists stand again on the battlefield—once again giving aid and comfort to our enemies.

The united front which the communists have made with the Arabs against the Jews is, for one thing, a clear misapplication of the general communist thesis concerning imperialism. Great Britain is, without a doubt, in Palestine because of its strategic importance for the control of her Eastern empire. From the standpoint

of the Jews, however, the alliance with Great Britain is only temporary and is based on no imperialistic design but on legitimate national needs. Was it legitimate for Russia to conclude a pact with France although that pact strengthened the French capitalist government? The vital needs of national self-defense forced the Russians, realists that they are, into compromise. The needs of the Jewish people are at least as desperate, driven and harrowed and persecuted as they now are in the countries of their present residence.

Palestine, moreover, has the capacity to absorb a still larger Jewish population without impairing the position of the native Arab inhabitants. By what moral claims can the Arabs deny to Jews the right to settle on land they do not use and do not need and for which the Jews are incidentally paying in cash? The Arab claim is, from a moral standpoint, no more valid than the claim of an individual capitalist who has cornered control over extensive properties that he does not need or cannot use but which he is denying to others who may be in desperate need of them.

The communist "line" is, we suspect, really grounded in the psychological aversion of the Jewish assimilationist to the reconstitution of the nationhood of Israel. This would account for the hysteria and the calumnies with which the statements of their position is generally accompanied.

Did not the *New Masses* (issue of May 12, 1936, p. 14) advise the Jews in Palestine to become Arabs? "It may be difficult," the *New Masses* graciously admits, "but no more difficult than for Jews to regard themselves as Americans or Englishmen or Frenchmen." Only yesterday the communists demanded national autonomy for the American negroes and campaigned under the slogan of "self-determination in the black belt." In the Soviet Union the Jews, as other national minorities, enjoy the rights of national and cultural autonomy. But for our Jewish communists the Jews must become "Arabs!"

No, comrades. In a socialist society the Jews will not have to become anything else; they will be able to be themselves. The culture of Palestine will then be neither Jewish nor Arabic, but socialist in content and, in the Arabic sector, Arabic in form; and in the Jewish sector, Jewish in form.

Prayer and the Modern Jew

By EUGENE KOHN

I.

"One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek:
That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
Contemplating the graciousness of the Lord and visiting early in His temple." (Psalms 27:4)

THE above is but one of the many passages in the book of Psalms which illustrate the intensity of passion that the Psalmists put into their communion with God. What rapture worship must have meant for the author of these words if the thought of the house of God could evoke such a response! In how many Jews today does the thought of the synagogue and its services call forth similar sentiments? Most Jews are so far from wanting to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of their lives that they visit only on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* and do not attend from the beginning to the end of the services even on those days. What is more, those Jews who do attend services regularly at more frequent intervals, even those who have retained the habit of daily prayer, confess, if they are can-

did, that they go through the ritual of worship more because of a sense of obligation than because they find it a thrilling religious experience. In a word, most Jews stay away from the synagogue because its services bore them; others attend and permit themselves to be bored; but very few Jews experience today that passion for communion with God which played so important a role in the spiritual life of our fathers.

That this is a loss cannot be denied. Life is not so full of rich emotional experiences that we can afford to shut the door to any such experience. We must not permit prayer to become a lost art. But, if the present tendency is for the act of prayer to be lost, we cannot arrest that tendency merely by deploring it. We must inquire into its cause and seek a remedy.

The problem is not entirely a new one. It has been with us ever since Judaism's emergence from the ghetto. In the early days of the Emancipation, lack of interest in the services was attributed to the dissatisfaction of the modern Jew with the undignified and unesthetic way in which the services of the traditional synagogue were conducted. Accordingly, congregations set about improving the decorum of the services and embellishing them with choral singing and even with instrumental music. But no one will today say that these innovations have proved successful in evoking an enthusiasm for worship.

Again the lack of interest in the services was explained as being due to the fact that congregations were too unfamiliar with the meaning of the Hebrew prayers and scriptural readings. Sermons and prayers in the vernacular were, therefore, introduced and are by now a feature of the services in most synagogues. But these, too, have not succeeded in creating an intense desire for worship.

Despairing of a solution, many blame the materialism of our age for this situation and wash their hands of the problem. But is the materialism of the age responsible? If this were so, we should expect that those of our people who are in the forefront of idealistic endeavors, the leaders in progressive social movements, the philosophers, scientists and creative artists among us, would be identified with the synagogue in a much greater proportion than the business men whose preoccupation with money making would tend to render them more insensitive to spiritual values. But the opposite is true. If there is any element of the Jewish population that has been conspicuously indifferent to the synagogue and its services, that element is the intelligentsia. We must then look more deeply for an explanation of the waning interest in worship, if we are to arrive at a diagnosis that can suggest a treatment.

II.

Perhaps it will help us to diagnose the situation, if we first seek an understanding of why men have ever found satisfaction in prayer. It will be convenient for this purpose to classify prayers into three groups: prayers of praise and thanksgiving, prayers of petition and entreaty, and prayers of solace and consolation. What has led men to put into words which they address to God their appreciations, their yearnings and their comforting thoughts?

There is no man alive who has never known a moment's enjoyment. If we are aware of the joy that we experience not merely as joyous in itself but as a symbol of all the joyous possibilities of life, we produce this effect, and thereby enhance immeasurably the value of our experience. That is the difference between mere enjoyment and grateful appreciation or thanksgiving. If a man give me a gift and I derive satisfaction from the gift itself, that is enjoyment; but if I derive satisfaction from the thought that the gift is an indication of

what I may expect of the giver in all our future relationships, I do not merely enjoy the gift, I enjoy my relation to the giver and am thankful for the gift. Prayers of praise and thanksgiving represent man's effort to make himself happily aware of the confidence he can repose in God as providing that life shall yield joy and blessing.

But no matter how keenly we appreciate the good in life, we cannot avoid experiencing the evil as well. The evil is as real as the good. Life seems to involve a rhythm of want and satisfaction, desire and fulfillment. The want and desire phase of the cycle is as real and significant as the satisfaction and fulfillment phase. To the extent that our needs can be met by some simple action of ours like partaking of food or lying down to sleep, we act without any necessary awareness of God. But we have needs that cannot be so easily satisfied by direct action of our own. If, for instance, men are to have their daily bread, they must plough and sow and reap, and even then the success of their efforts depends on rainfall and other conditions not under their control. They cannot go about such long-range efforts at all, unless they feel that somehow there is that in the universe which can be depended upon to answer their need if addressed aright. In a word they feel their dependence on a superhuman power or powers on whom the ultimate success of all their efforts depends. Our prayers of petition are then the articulation of our desires addressed to the power on whom their satisfaction depends. Faith in the efficacy of prayer —using the term in the more limited sense of prayers of petition or entreaty— is the faith that our desires, though unfulfilled are not unfulfillable, and that they will be fulfilled *if it is God's will.* By adding the qualifying phrase, "if it is God's will," we imply that they will be fulfilled *if they ought to be fulfilled,* if we should still desire their fulfillment, were we aware of all the consequences that would result from it.

There is no question that such a faith is life-enhancing: that it gives us courage to surmount obstacles which threaten us with frustration, and to persevere in our efforts at remedying evils and solving the problems that life presents to us. This is particularly true when we have in mind those wants that we experience not primarily as individuals but as social beings. The cycle of desire and fulfillment is here immeasurably extended. As members of society we are aware of wants that look to a time beyond the span of our individual lives for their fulfillment and may even demand the sacrifice of our lives. Consider man's quest for a remedy for cancer, or for the social evils resulting in war. If we lacked faith that somewhere in the constitution of the universe there is an answer to man's prayer for relief from these evils, we should give up in despair our efforts at abolishing them. For there is no assurance in logic that any answer to our needs exists. If then we work on the assumption that there is such an answer and that our deep desires carry with them an augury of future realization, we assert faith in the efficacy of prayer. Our fathers had this faith and it gave them courage, patience, and poise. In our generation it is largely lacking, and our jitters and failure of nerve are the natural concomitant of this lack of faith.

But, no matter how optimistic a view we may take of the possibility of remedying existing evils and transcending limitations that would fetter our self-realization, we cannot face reality without becoming aware of certain undesired conditions that no amount of wishing can alter. We cannot annihilate death; we cannot have a life that is wholly free from pain and sorrow. Yet somehow men have been able to live in full awareness of these limitations and to pronounce life good. They have

been able to do so by viewing life from a standpoint that accepts these limitations and transcends them. Pain can be endured because we know that it cannot last forever. And men have made it more endurable for themselves by the thought that their fortitude in bearing pain made life more livable for those who loved them and suffered with them, that their example helped others to endure temporary pain that would but render more significant an eventual happiness. We reconcile ourselves to the thought of death when we so identify our life with the life of society that our death cannot be for us the end of all that life means for us in that our purposes in life are effective beyond the grave and find fulfillment in a hereafter. Our earthly existence is then but a phase of the life eternal, and we feel that death cannot frustrate it or rob it of meaning. In fact we can even see in death part of the process by which life renews itself, a method of making room for new generations to make their contribution to the life eternal. Whatever ideas help us to triumph over death and decay by identifying our interests with the life that goes on after we have died are, therefore, life-enhancing and merit expression. Such are the prayers of comfort and consolation that have enabled men to adjust themselves to those situations which, from the standpoint of the individual, must be regarded as inevitable evils.

III.

It is then apparent that prayer has evoked enthusiasm because it has a distinct functional value in the enhancement of human life. It makes faith in God contribute to a grateful, hopeful and serene adjustment to reality. This function, which prayer performed for our fathers, still constitutes a need of human nature. If then that need remains unsatisfied by the present-day ritual of the synagogue, it means that that ritual somehow falls short of its purpose. All prayer, whether of thanksgiving, entreaty or consolation, is designed to express and thereby to strengthen our faith in God, to make God real to us and present to our minds, to make us feel ourselves in life-enhancing contact or communion with God. To serve that purpose two conditions are necessary: (1) that we possess faith and (2) that our prayers be a true expression of our faith.

There is, after all, a certain measure of truth in the contention that the materialism of the age is responsible for the lack of interest in worship. It is beyond question that the evils inherent in our social order have led many to despair of life, to feel that its evil outweighs its good, that all hopes are illusions, all ideals vanity, and that the ultimate victory is with death rather than with life. Such an attitude denies God and renders worship meaningless. The words of Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" are true: "He prayeth best who loveth best," and whatever makes life unlovely weakens the power of prayer. The remedy for the indifference to the synagogue does not lie wholly with the synagogue. It is bound up with the strengthening of our religious life by the creation of social conditions that make it easier for men to experience the worth of life, to see in it the manifestation of God.

But if the strengthening of religious faith is not wholly within the control of the synagogue, the synagogue must at least hold itself responsible for the veracity with which its prayers express the religious faith of the congregation. Prayer, being an effort at communion with God, must be appropriate to the conception of God that the worshiper holds and voice the spiritual needs that the worshiper experiences. Our expressions of gratitude to God must be influenced by how we consider ourselves related to God, and by what it is in life for which we feel most grateful. Our

prayers of petition must be influenced by what desires we believe to be in harmony with the character of God and worthy to be expressed and by our awareness of unfulfilled wants that we cannot, in our present state of knowledge, gratify by some simple direct action of our own. Our prayers of consolation depend for their effectiveness on what we believe to be the ultimate realities to which our contemplation of the divine is to help us adjust ourselves. It is because the synagogue has not revised its ritual in conformity with changes that have taken place in the conception of God held by thinking men that the synagogue cannot escape blame for the weakening among us of the spirit of worship.

IV.

Until modern times, all people, Gentiles as well as Jews, conceived of God, if not in anthropomorphic, at least in anthropopsychic terms. If they did not ascribe to Him corporeal attributes of form, size, and organic structure, they ascribed to Him psychic qualities similar to those of men. He loved, He punished, He rewarded, He forgave quite as any man may be conceived as doing. His relation to the universe was apprehended by analogy with the relation of the human soul, as it was then thought of, to the human body. The soul was conceived as an invisible, incorporeal inner man inhabiting the human body, animating it and governing it. Similarly God inhabited His universe (although as infinite and eternal He also transcended it) and by His will he animated it and governed it. This conception of God has dominated all the prayers of our ritual whether they be prayers of praise and thanksgiving, prayers of entreaty or prayers of consolation. Thanksgiving was couched in terms expressive not merely of a grateful appreciation of life's values, but in terms that regarded happy circumstances and events as special favors and acts of benevolence. Prayers of entreaty addressed themselves to God's compassion, emphasizing the abject impotence of man and the power over Him that God could arbitrarily exercise for weal or woe. Prayers of consolation were associated with the belief in personal immortality in the society of the blessed in Eden over which God Himself would preside in person.

But we today have such a different conception of reality, think of the world and life in such different categories, that the prayers based on such concepts as have been described no longer satisfy the need of thinking men for communion with God. Growing knowledge has shattered for them the conception of God which thinks of God as a divine Person, governing the universe with a personal will analogous to that of man. When people no longer take this personification literally, they commonly disavow their belief in a personal God and feel that they can no longer with sincerity join in the traditional prayers. Many go even further and, lacking imagination to perceive the possibility of a new conception of God which can be and needs to be articulated in new prayers, they profess an atheism that recognizes no function whatever for prayer. Such people do not see that behind the personification there is a reality which that personification symbolizes, and that the only mistake of the traditional view is the confusion of the symbol with the reality that it represents. As long as life is such that it inspires men with the sense of its value through their appreciation of truth, goodness and beauty, as long as life brings ideals into being as phases of the process by which it effects a creative adjustment of men to their environment, so long must we admit the reality of that aspect of being that men have personified as God. *What* God is we cannot know; *that* God is is implied in all that we experience of life's values. The God-idea does not function differently

if we think of God as a Being or as a quality or aspect of reality that sustains and gives worth to human personality. In either case, faith in God will call for articulate expression in prayers of gratitude, yearning and solace.

V.

But how can the synagogue reconstruct its liturgy in order to satisfy the demand for a religious service that is more accurately expressive of the highest appreciations and aspirations of the souls of men living today? The task is by no means a simple one. The answer can at best be only indicated here by suggesting a few criteria for a critical evaluation of the different elements of the service. The desired results will have to be achieved not by mere criticism but by creative expression along religious lines. It is important for us, however, to reckon with some of the difficulties that inhere in our task.

Many will question the worthwhileness of the effort in view of the paucity of those who feel that need of it. It is proposed to make our services significant for the thinking men and women who have experienced philosophical difficulties with the present text of our prayers. But how many of our worshipers are philosophically inclined? At best a very small fraction. The rest are unaware of any need for changing the prayers. Having a sentimental attachment to the traditional text based on habit and pleasant associations, they are likely to oppose any change. Why then trouble the great majority of worshipers for the sake of a small minority, most of whom are at present alienated from the synagogue and whose return to it as a result of our efforts is a hope but not a certainty?

Such argument offers a facile rationalization for that spiritual inertia which hampers even the most beneficent adjustment to the changing conditions of life. For it is false to assume that those who have not formuated for themselves in philosophic terms the challenge of modern experience to traditional habits of thought, feeling, and action have escaped all influence of the challenging experience. They may still profess religious beliefs identical with those of their fathers, but this profession is a lip-service which is contradicted by their actions. They may profess to believe that all the vicissitudes of life are the dispensations of an all-wise and benignant Providence, but they will not, like the *Hasid* in Meyer Levin's novel, *Jehuda,* refuse to take out fire-insurance because it is impious to insure oneself against an "act of God." Though many people adhere more or less to the traditional forms of Jewish religion, the spirit in which they adhere to them is untraditional. They may say the same words of prayer that their fathers uttered, but they are content to say them only because they say them without *kavvanah,* without concentrated attention to the meaning of what they are saying. Whether they are reading the cold, legalistic description of some archaic rite or a fervid outpouring of the psalmist's passionate communion with God, their mood remains the same. For prayer has become for them a *mizvat anashim melummadah,* "a human precept that has been taught," a ritual that they have been drilled to perform and not, in any true sense of the term, a communion with God.

But may there not be in their very clinging to this ritual something of a blind groping for an experience which they know their fathers enjoyed though they themselves have missed it? Do they not need to be taught how to experience communion with God? May not their resistance to all change in the services be like the resistance of a patient to a regimen of health that involves a change of his habits? To make the unintelligent habits of the unthinking the criterion of the form and content of our religious services rather than the conscious needs of those who are more

aware is like letting the habits of the patient rather than the knowledge of the physician determine treatment. In the Middle Ages the Jewish liturgy was developed by the inclusion of *piyyutim,* many of which embodied philosophical ideas about God which were far beyond the range of the popular thought of their day, but their expression in the liturgy helped to popularize them. Similarly today we should look for guidance to the thoughtful, not to the unthoughtful, and the synagogue should aim at popularizing the best religious thought of our day. By failing to do so the synagogue plays into the hands of irreligion, for the defections from the synagogue are to be found not only among the intellectuals for whom its ideas are inadequate, but among the unintellectual for whom its ritual is void of meaning and hence uninteresting.

VI.

Once we are convinced of the necessity and possibility of revising the liturgy so that it shall contribute to a sincere and life-enhancing communion with God, the main principles that must guide us in such revision become clear. The fundamental need is for the service to be meaningful. The criterion for accepting or rejecting a particular text can, therefore, never be a legal precedent or ordinance. For no law can compel thought or feeling. The fact that the utterance of certain words helped our fathers to experience a sense of being in tune with the Divine does not guarantee that the utterance of the same words will have the same effect on us. Let us take, for example, the passages descriptive of the ancient sacrifices and praying for their restoration. At the time when the Temple at Jerusalem was extant, our fathers believed that the sacrificial cultus was a divinely ordained method of establishing communion with God. At the time that the Temple was destroyed and the sacficial rites could not be performed, their minds were perturbed by the situation. But they hoped that the Temple would be rebuilt and the sacrificial ritual restored. Their prayers to this end were the sincere expression of a real want. But the modern Jew does not experience the lack of sacrifices as a bar to communion with God and does not, therefore, need to be consoled for their loss or to pray for their revival. Reverence for tradition may suggest the retention in the service of some reminiscent allusion to the ancient ritual of sacrifice, but it must be so worded as to be free from any implication as to the theurgic value of the sacrifices and from any expression of a desire, which is no longer sincere, for their restoration.

In addition to the elimination of all passages that have become meaningless, it is necessary to eliminate or amend all passages that express a meaning which runs counter to the highest ideals. All imprecations and prayers for vengeance against the enemies of Israel belong to this category. There are not many such prayers for vengeance, and their elimination can be effected without any considerable change in the character of our services. But a more difficult change and one which will doubtless meet with more resistance is the elimination or modification of passages that assume an inherent, necessary, and to all effects, permanent superiority of spiritual status for Israel over other peoples. If we identify God with whatever makes for justice, truth, peace and the realization of human ideals generally, we cannot think of Him as standing in any different relation to one race or nationality than to another. We may glory in the historic experiences by which our people came to recognize God and may be grateful for His self-revelation to us, but our expressions of gratitude for these experiences must not be phrased in terms that imply that the experience of other peoples cannot have afforded them as close a contact with God and as valid

a revelation of His character. For the highest ethical thought of our day recognizes in such pretensions of a people to superiority the rationalizations of national and racial egoism and self-assertion which are among the main impediments to human cooperation and world peace.

But our revision of the liturgy must not be merely negative. It involves more than the mere elimination of whatever fails to measure up to our highest ideals and thus separates us from God rather than enables us to cleave to Him. It must make room for new prayers which arise directly out of our present experiences as men and as Jews, prayers which speak the idiom of modern thought and voice the aspirations of modern Jews for surmounting present obstacles to our self-realization as individuals and as a people.

Our yearning for a truer and more sincere communion with God is itself a prayer. In the *Rosh Hashanah* liturgy, there is a passage in which the congregation voices this petition in behalf of those who lead them in the services: "Let not their mouth utter a word that is not according to Thy will." This and no lower standard must be the criterion by which we evaluate the text of our liturgy. Translated into the idiom of modern thought, it means that every word—and, we may add, every gesture, symbol, and musical motif—of our services must be in harmony with the character of God as the source of all that endows human life with value or holiness.

Facing Realities Realistically

By Jeremy Nabee

IN his highly interesting and illuminating series of three articles on "The Jew Faces Anti-Semitism," Rabbi Milton Steinberg analyzes fearlessly and intelligently the various proposed ways for stemming the modern anti-Jewish wave, which already submerges several countries and threatens to carry its destructive work even into the liberal democracies of the world. It is therefore surprising that he concludes with a rejection of the only "realistic solution" in favor of one which, upon close analysis, will be found unsound even as an emergency program.

The author of these articles spurns the Marxist solution of anti-Semitism, despite his concession that the competitive system is conducive to interracial frictions; and that the failure of the capitalist economy as an adequate distributive machine leads reactionaries, in order to keep the discontented masses from condemning their ruinous policies, to brand the Jew as the cause of all social ills. He doubts whether anti-Jewish feeling would pass with the achievement of a socialist society. He believes that there are also social and psychological factors which play a significant role in racial animosities, and which might conceivably exist and be utilized in crucial times even in a socialist state. Hence, although Marxism is theoretically opposed to racial prejudice, it may fail in this respect as did political democracy, also theoretically incompatible with intolerance and discrimination.

Besides, a radical solution is at present impractical, since Jews, chiefly a middle-class people, would oppose it either on principle or because of self-interest. And even if they could be persuaded to espouse the cause of socialism, their strivings for its realization would accomplish little, due to their relative impotence. Their efforts would only serve to drive reactionaries into the camp of the anti-Semites.

Since no complete solution is at present available, Rabbi Steinberg turns to one

which, at least, always tended to mitigate the pain of persecution, and even to endow the life of the oppressed with meaning. The Jew must prepare for his unhappy lot by becoming spiritually creative; he must seek not less Judaism but more—in an intellectually acceptable form. This will give him mental calm, enrich his life, and give him a feeling that his sufferings are not in vain.

To the student of history and economics it must be evident that excellent as the above program is per se, it can less meet the real issues of modern anti-Semitism than it did in the past, in the dark ages or in Czarist Russia. In the Middle Ages the Jew lived under extraordinary circumstances economically, socially, culturally, and religiously. Those were the days of feudalism. Society was then loosely organized. There was no nationalism in the modern sense of the word. The machine, the industrial revolution, leading to an economy of abundance, to so-called overproduction, unemployment, and conscious economic unrest had not arrived as yet. True, the Jew was excluded from the guild and the farm but there was the commercial field in which he played a dominant role. Jewish money was appropriated occasionally by outright repudiation of debts, by confiscation, or by loot. Generally speaking, however, the Jew was a religious and political but not economic victim. On the contrary, he often thrived, and used his wealth in a multitude of emergencies.

The fact that he did not suffer greatly eonomically might not have prevented him from becoming desperately dissatisfied with his lot of long and cruel suffering. There were other factors that saved him from despair, and from succumbing to external promptings to desert his group. He lived in a well-organized community, far superior to that of the non-Jew. His civilization—embracing all phases of life, spiritual and secular—not only did not clash with the Gentile civilization existing *alongside* it; it even offered its members such material benefits as education and genuine social life, seldom enjoyed by the average Gentile.

Yet, even these advantages might have failed the Jew in the face of ever-recurring persecutions and expulsions. It was the burning, unflinching faith in a Supreme Being who, out of his love for the Jewish people, chose them as a nation of priests, beneficiaries of a divine Torah, sent into exile to be tested and purified for the ultimate redemption, when Israel, glorified by all nations, will return to his homeland, that enabled our ancestors to triumph over their oppressors. The potency of these beliefs is shown by the ready credence the Jews gave to the numerous messianic movements, and by the disillusionment and despair that followed their inevitable collapse.

The industrial revolution has changed the above picture entirely. No longer does the Jew live in a civilization of his own alongside another. He has emerged from the ghetto; he can never return to it if he is to survive. He must remain in contact with the outer world. A person who will subscribe to an intellectually acceptable Judaism will not fail to feel, feel bitterly, the fact that there is an educational and social world, indispensable nowadays to a truly creative life, from which he and his children are barred.

A sufferer, if he is not to surrender to an unkind fate and if his sensibilities have not yet become dull and blunted, must have some justification for his pain. He must possess the feeling that his suffering is a voluntary sacrifice for a lofty ideal; or he must believe that his hardships will eventually end, and that some day he will be able to live a happier life. The pious Jew of the ghetto with his unshakeable faith in a special Providence was actuated by both beliefs. But is it also true of one who does not believe in a chosen people and in an inevitable, miraculous, final emancipation? If he is morally and intellectually honest, will he not be compelled to admit that his suffering is not a willing sacrifice for an ideal, and that whether religious or not he is the target of the anti-Semite? And will not pro-

longed suffering lead such a victim either to rebellion—or to despair?

There is yet another objection to a purely Jewish solution. We have already shown that in the Middle Ages, regardless what the causes for the anti-Jewish sentiments were, their concrete manifestation was essentially non-economic. Even in Czarist agricultural Russia this was true. Unfortunately, in industrial countries anti-Jewish manifestation is not only political and social, but also economic. This no one can deny, not even the conservative. Consequently, it is immaterial whether the radical is right or wrong in his contention that the causes are economic. No spiritual force can avail against the modern invincible weapon of economic discrimination. Its devilishly destructive power has already been felt in Poland—a country far from completely industrialized—where thousands of Jews are literally starving. No religious ideologies can cope with conditions in that country, once the stronghold of the Jewish religion and Jewish culture. The morale of the victims there is being rapidly undermined, some sinking into deeper superstitions, some despairing, and others rebelling by joining the extreme right or left parties. In Germany, where Jews have been prosperous and comparatively few in numbers, less than four years of Nazism has already forced more than 20 per cent of our co-religionists to seek aid in Jewish charitable institutions, this despite the help and protests of an aroused world.

Modern industrial conditions render a purely religious solution to anti-Semitism untenable. Does this mean that the future of the Jew is hopeless, that he is irrevocably doomed? Not at all. Since the most formidable menace to Jewish survival is the economic *outlet* of racial hostility, it is obvious that any solution must include in its program the elimination of the causes of economic maladjustment, namely the substitution of a cooperative economy for the present competitive system. The argument that socialism might not do away with anti-Semitism, which has other *causes* in addition to the economic, should not serve as a deterrent to this aim. The economic manifestation of anti-Semitism is a certainty; its existence under socialism a hypothesis. One never shrinks from attempting to cure a malady for fear that another might arise later. On the other hand, it is quite reasonable to expect racial hate not to play a significant role in a society from which the potent economic stimulus has disappeared.

It is not quite fair to compare industrial to political democracy, whose advent also was hailed as signifying the end of intolerance and discrimination. True political democracy was really never attained; it is an impossibility without industrial democracy. The democratic revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries did bring a measure of political freedom, but that could not be of lasting duration; for no philosophy or religion can long be maintained by, or in turn control, an insecure and economically enslaved people. No structure, irrespective of its strength, can remain standing without a strong foundation—and in normal society the basis for life with all its social and cultural values, religious and philosophic concepts, is economics, the means for animal existence. Hence, the failure of past social movements and philosophies, and the potential success of a socialist society for achieving a just world.

Although Jews are few in numbers they could contribute considerably to the realization of this type of society. The determined minority battling for new social conceptions often emerges victorious. The great masses of people, exploited and misled by a powerful few, first resist those who come to enlighten and rescue them; but persistence may win a following large enough for final victory, provided the critical point in social disintegration, when revolution becomes a necessity, has not been reached yet. At present, the extreme form of Marxism, i.e., communism, is not the only way whereby to defeat re-

action. The movement for a system based on production for use and not for profit is gaining headway among labor and the middle class. Jewish individuals have already contributed greatly to progressive movements, and should continue their efforts to a greater extent. Nor should fear of antagonizing reactionaries deter them. If we grant the importance of the economic factor in anti-Semitism, both in manifestation and cause, we must also concede that the failure of the present economic system will inevitably lead to the use of the Jew as a scapegoat. Only the triumph of the progressive forces over those of reaction can prevent that catastrophe. In connection with this we may well quote from an article by Rabbi Edward L. Israel in the RECONSTRUCTIONIST (Jan. 25, 1935) entitled "Social Idealism in Jewish Life." He says:

"In the diaspora or even in Palestine, this will involve risking the danger of stimulating anti-Semitism among the forces of reaction. Nevertheless, it is by risking such dangers that the Jew has lived through the centuries. In theological ages we defied our environment by holding steadfastly to those things which often meant persecution and death. Now in an age dominated by economic motives, we have to hold fast to the social ideals of Jewish life, even though it mean that we face an increased anti-Semitism."

Not only does the diaspora Jew depend upon the early realization of a world of justice but also the Palestinian. It is interesting that Herzl attempted to persuade the Kaiser to espouse the cause of Zionism because it would serve to turn Jewish revolutionary youth from socialism. Since Herzl's death it has become evident that his dream will not be fully realized in a competitive world. Arab atrocities, a result of Britain's conflicting colonial policies, and Italian imperialist ventures contain the reasons for the above statement. Long ago the great Hebrew Prophets sensed that Israel could not hope to survive in a warring and unjust world. The sad experiences of their nation gave them insight into this truth. Hence, the leaning of these great nationalists to universalism. True in their days, in a world torn with political strife, it is truer in our times, in a world suffering from conflicting, predatory, economic interests.

It is obvious that the Jew should fight in the battle against injustice not as a Jew but as one interested in creating a new world. He must realize that the struggle with reaction cannot be postponed for a more opportune moment. Time is an advantage for the enemies of civilization, because they are constantly organizing and strengthening their forces.

But will the Jewish masses readily submit to this program? Are they not chiefly middle-class in interests and psychology? The answer is that the Jewish middle class is also restless, looking for economic salvation. But even if Jews were unwilling to accept the philosophy of a cooperative society, should it alter our program? Has not reluctance to recognize their own welfare frequently been the case with the Jewish masses, with all masses? Are leaders, who aim to lead, to follow blindly the misinformed and unseeing numbers?

In conclusion Jewish religious leaders should formulate a combined, comprehensive program, aiming at the religious elevation and material amelioration of the Jews. They should hold up to their followers the vision of a better world, that will stir them as did the old messianic ideal. Otherwise, these leaders will fail even in their partial undertakings. The Jews with economic foresight will become even more anti-religious than now, as has already been pointed out in the pages of the RECONSTRUCTIONIST. Advanced religious thinkers agree that religious people must unite with the revolutionary forces if religion is to survive.

Question and Answer

Dear Dr. Kaplan:

I suppose you know that a RECONSTRUCTIONIST study group composed of about fifteen intelligent men has been organized here and a few very interesting meetings have been held. The group could very easily be enlarged, but it is thought advisable at this time to keep it down so that an intensive study may be made of the problem.

In the early discussions, there was very general agreement as to the nature of the problem. However, there seems to be constant disagreement sometimes bordering on resentment concerning the claim constantly made by you that Judaism was maintained chiefly on the doctrine of immortality. Despite other remarks of yours, the early chapters of your book iterate and reiterate that other-worldliness was the impelling motive in keeping Jews constant.

Many of us feel that the emphasis is too strong. I would for instance call your attention to the fact again, that were it true, Jewish customs, prayers, and folk-life would show much greater evidences. It is my own modest opinion that other-worldliness in the accepted "Catholic" sense is a degeneration from the messianic ideal in Judaism. That Jews all through the ages were looking right around the corner for a better world, is a truism; the emphasis on personal immortality seems to have borne rich fruit in Eastern Europe in the last three or four hundred years.

I call your attention to the fact that if you condemn, so to speak, Judaism as having been propped up chiefly by the doctrine of other-worldliness plus the doctrine of revelation, you make it that much more difficult to validate the theory that Judaism has been more than these two things—that it has been a living organic civilization. You make it necessary to do more than reconstruct. Of course I am not forgetting the many factors of conservation that you mention, but the emphasis on the points mentioned in this letter causes misgivings and misunderstandings in many of these ds-cussions.

LAWRENCE W. CROHN.

Detroit, Mich., May 13, 1936.

The statement, that I attribute the survival of Judaism in the past to "the doctrine of immortality," indicates a complete misunderstanding of the point I am trying to make. It is a misunderstanding which derives from a psychological fallacy that is responsible for all anachronisms. It betrays the tendency to think of a past situation not in its own terms, but in terms of the situation in which we find ourselves, as when the Talmudists picture David as engaged in the study of Halakah.

The other-worldliness which I continually emphasize as having marked Judaism of the past was not merely "a doctrine of immortality." It was infinitely more than a doctrine: it was a world-outlook, a mind picture which everyone, not only Jews but also Christians and Mohammedans, carried in his head not as a matter of religious doctrine but of common sense. Nothing is more untrue and misleading than the notion that it is religion that gives us our world outlook. The very contrary is the fact. It is the world outlook that determines the beliefs or doctrines which constitute our religion. The world outlook itself is based upon whatever race experience we happen to have assimilated. The belief in the pre-Enlightenment era that the fulfillment (salvation) of human life was possible only in the world to come was originally part of religion in the same sense that all thinking and all art were part of religion, but basically it was accepted in the same way as the geography of this world or the astronomy of the heavens was accepted, namely, as a matter of fact and experience.

When, therefore, I maintain that Judaism was an other-worldly civilization I do not mean merely that it had "a doctrine of immortality," but that its way of life was perfectly understandable to every Jew and Gentile because it fell in with a mind-picture of reality which was in everybody's head. Just because other-worldliness was such a mind-picture, it did not have to be referred to frequently in customs, prayers and folk-life, though it was continually assumed in all of them. The assumption that the world is round is probably not mentioned even once in a whole week's magazines and newspapers for the simple reason that everything contained in them is based upon this assumption.

The main point, therefore, is that until modern times, Jews knew where to place themselves and their civilization in the scheme of things because there was only one such scheme which everybody took for granted. Jews were oriented; and there is nothing so essential to self-adjustment as being oriented. With the old geography of life smashed to bits, so to speak, Jews have lost their bearings, and the problem now is to find our bearings in the modern scheme of reality, in the present-day geography of life. In such a geography "the doctrine of immortality" is a section reserved for those who are engaged in the study of the meaning of personality. Only their results and no mere verbal and oft-meaningless formula handed down by tradition can henceforth serve as a basis of religious teaching, whether it be Jewish or general, with regard to the nature of personal immortality. But Jews have far more immediate problems to solve than the one of personal immortality. The problem of present-day existence and the forms and activities in which such existence must express itself are far more urgent. These demand an immediate solution. This constitutes the task of transforming Judaism from an other-worldly to a this-worldly civilization. This is no easy task. It calls for thoroughgoing reconstruction of the old and, even more, for the construction of much that is altogether new. But it is not an impossible task if we only have the will and the intelligence to apply ourselves to it.

MORDECAI M. KAPLAN.....